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Former director gives an inside look at CIA

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Philadelphia is the 11th stop on a book-promotion tour that will take Stansfield Turner and his wife to 12 cities in 24 days.

"Is this Cleveland?" Turner says with a smile.

"No, this is Monday," someone says.

"Have we done that much?" Turner's wife, Karen, asks in disbelief.

"Yes."

"Wow."

They're at the Marriott on City Avenue for a quick lunch between two TV interviews in the morning and two radio interviews in the afternoon. The book Turner is promoting is called *Secrecy and Democracy: The CIA in Transition*. Turner was director of the Central Intelligence Agency under his Annapolis classmate Jimmy Carter. (Turner ranked 25th among 820 in the class of 1946; Carter was 59th.)

In February 1977 Carter summoned Adm. Turner, on an hour's notice, to return from Naples, where he was serving as commander in chief of the southern flank of NATO. A career Navy man and former Rhodes scholar who had served in a variety of commands, Turner hoped he was about to be named chief of naval operations.

Instead, Carter made him director of central intelligence, putting him in charge of an agency reeling under recent revelations that during its 30-year history it had committed a multitude of abuses, including plots to assassinate foreign leaders, drug experiments on unwitting subjects and illegal spying on U.S. citizens.

What he found at the CIA, and what he did about it, are discussed at length in his book, and Turner adopts no air of false modesty in appraising the result. "I think it's the best view of the CIA ever written, because it was written by somebody on the inside who really understood it because he was there making the decisions at the top, but yet somebody who was an outsider and who could look at it more objectively than those insiders who have previously written books on the CIA. It's unique in that regard."

A major theme of the book is the conflict that inevitably arises when an open, democratic society conducts secret intelligence operations. When Carter was in the White House and Turner was at the CIA, a reasonable balance was struck between openness and secrecy, in Turner's view; he feels that is not the case under President Reagan and William Casey.

In the introduction to his book, Turner complains that Casey's CIA made more than 100 deletions, ranging "from borderline issues to the ridiculous," when he submitted his book for security clearance.

"One of the things that I could not put in my book — and which I took all the way to the ultimate level in the CIA and they took to the White House — was a quotation from a speech I gave in the CIA auditorium to the alumni of Vassar College of Washington, D.C. What I said was, in my opinion, totally unclassified. And if I told you what it was, you would laugh. You would rip your sides apart when I told you the subject that they wouldn't let me talk about that I'd already talked about in public."

No quotes

He says the CIA also would not let him quote from Carter's memoirs of his presidency, *Keeping Faith*, and refused to tell him why. When he protested, he says he was told "you have to do what you feel you have to do" but was threatened with a lawsuit if he did. "If they really were worried about the secret," he wonders, why did they leave it up to him whether "this secret of great importance to our country was suddenly [going to be] spewed out into the public domain in an irretrievable way. So they clearly weren't interested in the secret."

What, then, is their interest?

"Their interest is in preserving their right to protect themselves."

Ironically, it was CIA chief Turner who, as he acknowledges in *Secrecy and Democracy*, urged then-Attorney General Griffin Bell to prosecute an ex-CIA employee, Frank Snepp, for publishing the book *Decent Interval*. In it, Snepp discussed the fall of Saigon and what he contended were the United States' shoddy role and inept behavior during that event.

Snepp had signed the usual CIA contract agreeing to submit anything he wrote about the agency to security review. The prosecution was successful: In a case that went to the Supreme Court, Snepp was compelled to forfeit all his profits from the book and forbidden to write or say anything about the CIA without the agency's permission.

A different case

The Snepp case, Turner insists, is entirely different from his own: "We didn't prosecute Snepp for secrecy, we prosecuted him for violating a contract, and if we had not prosecuted him, how could we prosecute the next person?"

When he ran the CIA, he says, the agency carried out its clearances "much less arbitrarily and with no arrogance. The process is a good process. It's a necessary one I still support. I do not resent having to submit my book for clearance. I resent the arbitrariness and the arrogance of the Reagan administration's handling of that. They have changed the policy since I left."

Turning to current events that have great resonance for him — he headed the CIA during the Iranian hostage situation — Turner takes issue with those who hold that the United States should make no deal to free the hostages currently held by Shiite terrorists. He dismisses the argument that yielding to blackmail would set a dangerous precedent:

"The President keeps saying we'll make no concessions to terrorists. Why aren't we at the Beirut airport? We're not there because the terrorists drove us out.

"I want to support the President, because I remember what pain it

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gave President Carter when he was being criticized from his political opposition for his handling of the hostage crisis, and I think President Reagan is doing a fine job. What worries me is the criticism he's getting from his own political spectrum, the demands that we make absolutely no concessions, that we be totally ready to retaliate, maybe even retaliate now."

His own advice

Suppose he were still director of central intelligence? How would he advise the President?

"I'd do just what he's doing."

But what he's doing is insisting that there will be no concessions, no linkage.

"That's right. I'd do that — and then make a linkage, and make a deal, and get our people out. You don't think Ronald Reagan does what he says, do you? He said he was not going to pull out of Beirut on Friday before the Monday that he pulled the Marines out of Beirut. You of the media don't bother to remember that."

Recalling that in April 1980 Reagan had said the Tehran hostage situation never should have been tolerated for even six days, he says: "Well, we're on Day 11 right now." But he adds that at least now Reagan is saying the "absolutely right" thing — "that for us to take out innocent people in order to try to get at some terrorists would be an act of terrorism in itself, and that's not what the United States stands for. . . . I'm glad that he finally, after about five years, has come to where his rhetoric has confronted reality."

Turner believes that the Reagan administration has little to boast about in its handling of foreign affairs. To one reviewer of his book — Charles Lichenstein, former U.N. delegate under Reagan, who ticked off a series of alleged foreign policy failures "on Stansfield Turner's watch" — Turner responds:

"Would he look on the 241 Marines [killed in Beirut in 1983] as a major success in the Middle East? Would he look on the fact that they weren't smart enough to ward off three bombings, continued killing of Americans there, as a tremendous success? Would he look on the situation in Central America as a great success today? Are the American people really pleased that [in Nicaragua] we mined the harbors and that we wrote a manual of assassination? Is he pleased that the CIA is implicated in the truck bombing of 80 innocent women and children in Beirut in the last few weeks?

"I guess he's very proud that the Reagan administration has one, and, I think, only one, success in foreign policy in 4½ years, that I know of, and that's that we managed to beat up on 600 Cubans in Grenada, and we only sent in *fourteen thousand* troops to do it."

In *Secrecy and Democracy*, Turner devotes a great deal of space to counterespionage and the problem of tracking down "moles" and traitors while protecting the rights and liberties of citizens. The book was printed before the Walker spy-ring case broke, implicating John A. Walker, a former Navy radioman with top-secret clearance at Atlantic Fleet Headquarters in Norfolk, Va.; his older brother, Arthur; his son, Michael, a Navy communications specialist, and a friend, Jerry A. Whitworth.

During his CIA tenure, Turner says, he froze clearances for special intelligence — things rated above "top secret" — and cut by 30 percent the security clearances of civilian firms doing business with the CIA. But he had no control over the Pentagon. "I tried to do it with the Defense Department," he says, "and ran into a stone wall."

The Pentagon, he holds, is at long last on the right track in planning to cut the number of security clearances by half — "we just have too many people with security clearances, so it's difficult to screen them as thoroughly as you should" — but that, he adds, is only part of the answer.

The Carter administration, he says, sought to take as much information as possible out of the "classified" category; its successor has gone in exactly the opposite direction in its "blind belief that more classification keeps more secrets." The result, he says, has been to "let loose the natural instincts of the CIA, which are to classify everything. And that's what they're doing."

Turner defends his controversial action, a few months after he took charge of the agency, of firing 17 old CIA hands and forcing 147 others into retirement — the "Halloween Massacre" — although he concedes that the abrupt way the agents were notified was "unconscionable."

To critics who have accused him of decimating the CIA's clandestine capabilities, he responds that the recommendation to cut staffing had been made under his predecessor, George Bush, who "just couldn't face up to doing anything about it." Moreover, he says, the ousted individuals had all been rated in the bottom 5 to 10 percent, and not one of the 820 positions eliminated was overseas.

"This was bureaucratic overhead," he says, "and anyone who has ever served in a big bureaucracy would not question my assertion that bigger bureaucracy is not necessarily better bureaucracy."

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Stansfield Turner and wife, Karen, during Philadelphia visit